

# Experimental demonstration of fractional orbital angular momentum entanglement of two photons

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## Abstract

The singular nature of a non-integer spiral phase plate allows easy manipulation of spatial degrees of freedom of photon states. Using two such devices, we have observed very high dimensional ( $D > 3700$ ) spatial entanglement of twin photons generated by spontaneous parametric down-conversion.

PACS numbers: 03.67.Mn, 42.50.Dv

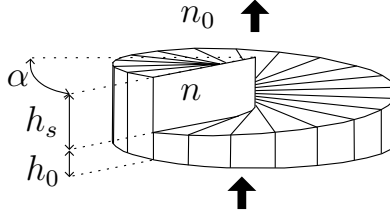


FIG. 1: Schematic drawing of a spiral phase plate (SPP) with a step index  $\ell = h_s(n - n_0)/\lambda$ , where  $h_s$  is the step height,  $n$  and  $n_0$  are the refractive indices of the SPP and the surrounding medium, respectively, and  $\lambda$  is the wavelength of the incident light.

In the early 1990s, it was realized that the quantum state of a photon in a Laguerre-Gaussian laser mode  $\text{LG}_p^l$  is an eigenstate of the orbital angular momentum (OAM) operator, with eigenvalue  $l\hbar$  ( $l$  integer) [1, 2]. The mode functions  $\text{LG}_p^l$  ( $l = -\infty \dots \infty$ ,  $p = 0 \dots \infty$ ) can be used as a basis of an infinite-dimensional Hilbert space, and thus to describe, within the paraxial approximation, a photon state represented by an arbitrary spatial wave function.

According to theory, the twin photons created in spontaneous parametric down-conversion (SPDC) are entangled in the full, infinite-dimensional (spatial) Hilbert space; in fact, they are maximally entangled [3, 4]. Several years ago, Mair *et al.* [5] demonstrated OAM entanglement in a 3D subspace of that Hilbert space, in an experiment where they used integer-OAM analyzers. It has been recently proposed that spatial entanglement can be demonstrated in an *infinite*-dimensional subspace [6]. This can be achieved by using *fractional*-OAM analyzers, in view of the fact that fractional OAM states are coherent superpositions of an infinite number of  $\text{LG}_p^l$  states with integer OAM. Here we report an experimental implementation of this idea, employing two half-integer OAM analyzers; we confirm the predicted entanglement of fractional OAM and deduce a dimensionality of  $D > 3700$  per photon, the entangled space having a dimensionality  $D^2$ .

The key element in our approach is the use of a spiral phase plate (SPP) [7, 8], shown in Fig. 1, as part of our analyzer. This plate imprints an azimuth-dependent phase retardation on an incident field. The difference in phase retardation  $\Delta\phi$  at azimuthal angles 0 and  $2\pi$  is equal to  $\Delta\phi \equiv 2\pi\ell$ , whereby the plate adds an average OAM of  $\ell\hbar$  per photon. By adjusting the SPP parameters (see caption of Fig. 1), the SPP index  $\ell$  can be tuned to any desired value. If  $\ell$  is *non-integer*, the output field is *not* cylindrically symmetric (cf. Fig. 3(b)) and carries a mixed screw-edge dislocation in the near field, i.e. a singularity with a transverse

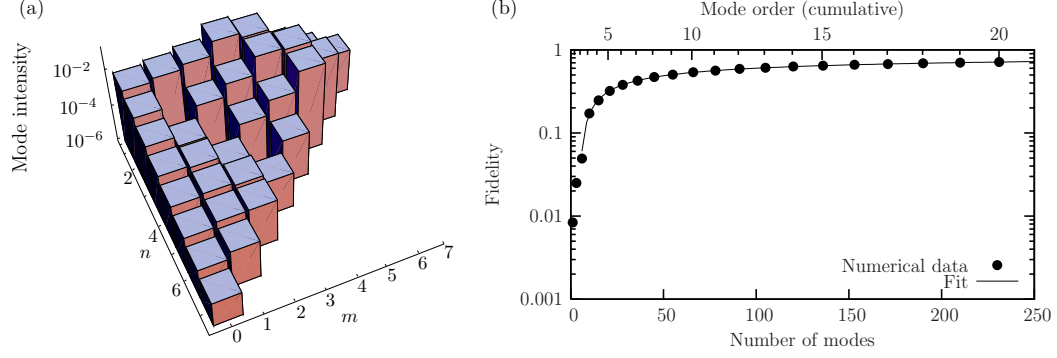


FIG. 2: Decomposition of the analyzer mode, associated with an SPP with  $\ell = 3.5$  and a single-mode fiber, into LG modes. (a) The contribution per LG mode for mode orders  $m + n \leq 7$ , where  $l = n - m$  and  $p = \min(n, m)$ . (b) The fidelity of the mode decomposition as a function of number of modes used in the decomposition. Each of the data points is calculated for LG modes of mode order up to and including the value indicated on the top axis. The solid line is an accurate fit to the numerical data, allowing extrapolation.

component; this dislocation is associated with the radial edge of the SPP [8]. Thus, for all non-integer  $\ell$ , the SPP is characterized by two parameters, namely the step index  $\ell$  itself and the orientation of the radial edge of the SPP,  $\alpha$ . The latter is varied by rotating the SPP around the beam axis.

Our approach involves the use of two fractional-OAM analyzers (one per arm) in an SPDC setup. Such an analyzer consists of a non-integer SPP, a single-mode fiber and a detector; the orientations of the radial edges of the SPPs are varied (see Fig. 3(a) below). Because the SPPs have a non-integer step index  $\ell$ , the fractional OAM states provide a natural basis to describe the two-photon state [6]. Each element of this fractional basis can be written as an  $\ell$  and  $\alpha$  dependent superposition of an infinite number of  $\text{LG}_p^l$  states, extending over both  $l$  and  $p$ . Because this superposition changes when we reorient the SPP, we explore an *infinite*-dimensional subspace of the full, (spatial) Hilbert space by systematically varying  $\alpha$  (at constant step index  $\ell$ ). We stress that the contribution of  $\text{LG}_p^l$  modes with  $p \neq 0$  to this superposition is significant; this is caused by the fact that the dislocation imprinted by the SPP on the incident field has a mixed screw-edge character [8].

The most convenient implementation of this scheme is by choosing the non-integer part  $\mathcal{L}$  of the step index  $\ell$  to be half-integer, i.e.  $\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2}$ ; the states with  $\alpha = 0$  and  $\alpha = \pi$  are then orthogonal (independent of the integer part of  $\ell$ ) [6]. When we place an analyzer containing

an SPP with index  $\ell$  in the signal path of a SPDC setup, and one containing an SPP with index  $-\ell$  in the idler path, the coincidence probability as a function of the orientations of the two SPPs is predicted to be [6]

$$P_c(\alpha_s, \alpha_i) = C \left( 1 - \frac{|\alpha_s - \alpha_i|}{\pi} \right)^2, \quad (1)$$

viz. a parabolic coincidence fringe with a visibility of unity. The constant  $C$  depends on the overlap of the radial part of the two-photon state as emanating from the SPDC crystal, with the radial part of the fiber mode [6]. This parabolic coincidence fringe, which is a function of only the *relative* orientation of the two SPPs, reveals the entanglement of the twin photons.

The key to success in the experiment lies in the analyzers or, more specifically, in the two SPPs. Our SPPs have been manufactured using a polymer molding technique starting from a micro-machined mold, yielding identical plates with  $\ell = \pm 3.48 \pm 0.02$  at the (degenerate SPDC) wavelength of 813 nm. The step of each SPP is not abrupt but in fact a linear ramp with an azimuthal width of  $6^\circ$ . Furthermore, the plates show a central ‘anomaly’ with a diameter of about  $300 \mu\text{m}$  [9]. The rest of the plate has an rms deviation of  $\approx 15$  nm from the ideal shape [10].

The high-dimensional nature of the  $\ell = 3.5$  SPP is illustrated in Fig. 2(a), which shows a modal decomposition for mode order  $\leq 7$  if the input is a fundamental Gaussian  $\text{LG}_0^0$  (i.e. the fiber mode). The fidelity of this truncated decomposition is only 43% (Fig. 2(b)). When truncating at mode order 20 (corresponding to 231 LG modes), the fidelity becomes 71%. Extrapolation shows that a fidelity of 98% requires about 125000 LG modes. We have checked that these results remain essentially unchanged when using the actual topography of our SPP plates; in particular, the finite azimuthal width of the step has no significant effect.

The SPDC setup is shown in Fig. 3(a). The pump laser is a 50 mW Krypton-ion laser (Spectra Physics 2060) operating at a wavelength of 406.7 nm. Its output is weakly focused on a nonlinear crystal (BBO), with beam waist  $w_0 = 0.78 \pm 0.01$  mm. The crystal has a thickness  $L = 1.0$  mm and has been cut for nearly collinear type-II SPDC. Before inserting a fractional-OAM analyzer in each arm, we test the setup by observing polarization entanglement; we achieve 95% and 92% fringe visibility in the crystal (H,V) and  $45^\circ$  basis, respectively [11].

We fix the polarizers in the crystal basis and insert a fractional-OAM analyzer with SPP

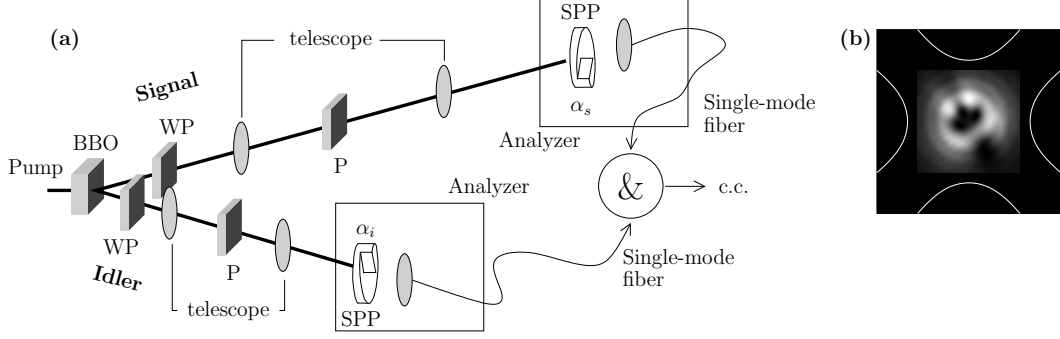


FIG. 3: (a) The SPDC setup for establishing high-dimensional entanglement with two analyzers. The SPDC crystal (BBO) is tilted so that the angle between the signal and idler arms is  $6^\circ$ . In both arms, one encounters a 0.5 mm-thick wave plate (WP) for walk-off compensation, a telescope that images the nonlinear crystal onto the SPP, a Polarcor<sup>TM</sup> polarizer (P) and a red filter (not shown) to eliminate stray pump light. The down-converted photons are focused with microscope objectives onto single-mode fibers leading to single-photon-counting modules; coincidence counts are measured. Both SPPs can be rotated ( $\alpha_s$  and  $\alpha_i$ ) around the respective beam axes. (b) An experimental far-field intensity pattern of the analyzer mode. The white curves indicate the 90% iso-intensity lines of the SPDC rings, illustrating that the analyzer mode completely falls in the region of twin-photon degeneracy.

index  $\ell_s = +3.48$  in the signal path and an analyzer with SPP index  $\ell_i = -3.48$  in the idler path. The SPDC cone-crossings in the far field are found to be much larger than the far-field intensity pattern of the analyzer mode, as illustrated in Fig. 3(b). The SPDC intensity varies about 10% over the SPP diffraction profile.

The SPPs have to be aligned with great precision. In particular, both the rotation axis and the center of each SPP have to be aligned, with a precision of order  $1 \mu\text{m}$ , with the core of the corresponding single-mode fiber. Only when this amount of care is invested in aligning the optical elements, can one rotate both SPPs to make use of the  $\alpha_s$  and  $\alpha_i$  degrees of freedom without losing any signal.

Our experimental results are shown in Fig. 4: four coincidence fringes (obtained for idler SPP-settings  $\alpha_i = 0, \pi/2, \pi, 3\pi/2$ ) as a function of the signal SPP-setting  $\alpha_s$ . These fringes are shown together with the expected coincidence fringes as predicted by Eq. (1). The data show that the coincidence-count rate as a function of the orientation of the signal SPP has a parabola-like shape. Additionally, when the idler SPP is re-oriented, we see that

the fringe shifts accordingly. Consequently, we find, according to the quantum-mechanical prediction, that the parabolic coincidence fringe depends only on the *relative* orientation of the SPPs. Analytical calculations in which one assumes a completely separable (as opposed

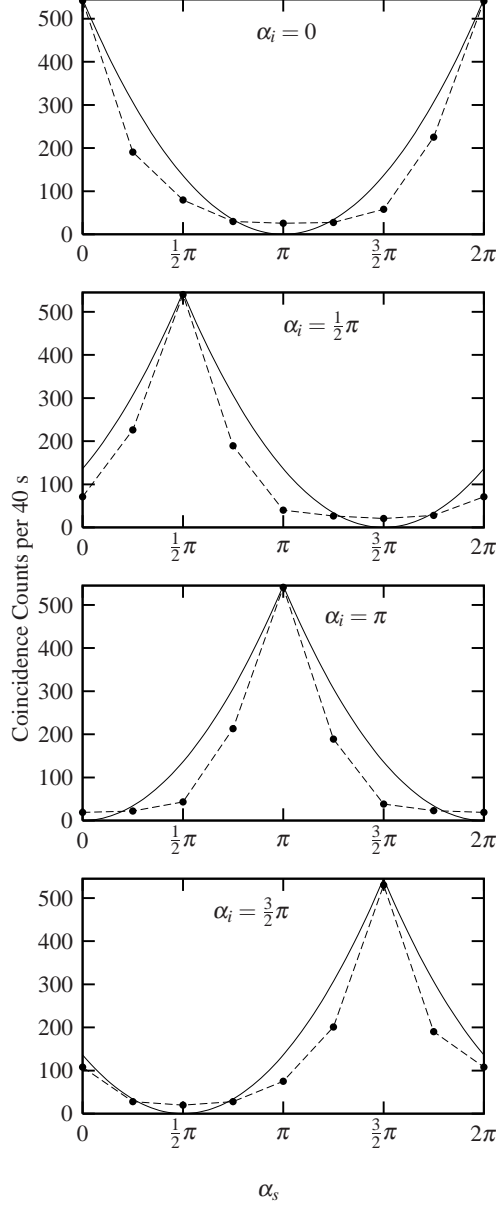


FIG. 4: The measured coincidence fringes (circles and broken line segments to guide the eye) and the theoretical fringes (curves) as a function of the orientation  $\alpha_s$  of the SPP in the signal arm. The parabolic fringe shifts concordantly with the orientation  $\alpha_i$  of the SPP in the idler arm.

to entangled) two-photon state while OAM is conserved per pair, result in fringes of *zero* visibility. In the context of a quantum-mechanical description of the SPDC process, the

experimental data show thus entanglement. However, based on the present set of data, we cannot prove quantum non-locality using the two-dimensional Clauser-Horne-Shimony-Holt version of the Bell inequality [12], in contrast to what we predicted earlier [6, 13].

The dimensionality of the Hilbert space in which each photon of the pair lives, must be  $D > 2$  as can be concluded from the parabolic shape of the fringes in Fig. 4; after all, for  $D = 2$ , as in polarization entanglement, a sinusoidal fringe would appear. Regretfully, the fringes do not directly betray the precise dimensionality; nevertheless, we can make an estimate based on the following considerations.

The dimensionality  $D$  of the subspace probed in the experiment is either limited by the number of entangled modes emitted by the BBO crystal, expressed by the Schmidt number  $K$  [14, 15], or by the (spatial) modal bandwidth of the analyzers,  $N$ . To estimate  $K$ , we follow Law and Eberly's approximate analytical theory [16],

$$K > \frac{1}{4} \left( \sqrt{\frac{L}{w_0^2 k_p}} + \sqrt{\frac{w_0^2 k_p}{L}} \right)^2. \quad (2)$$

Our experimental values for the pump-beam waist  $w_0$ , crystal length  $L$  and the pump wavenumber  $k_p$  result in a lower limit to the Schmidt number,  $K > 3700 \pm 100$ . A comparison between the approximate and exact theories for the value of  $K$  shows that, for high values of  $K$ , as in the present case, the approximate theory yields a severe underestimation.

To make sure that our analyzers are not limiting the dimensionality of the probed subspace to  $D < 3700$ , we need to establish that their modal bandwidth  $N \gg 3700$ . This can be accomplished by examining the conversion efficiency of the two analyzers, positioned as an optical train in a classical-optics experiment: we use one analyzer to convert the fundamental Gaussian mode from a laser beam to an extended superposition of LG modes, while the other is used to convert this superposition back to the fundamental Gaussian mode. The conversion efficiency, which we found to be 98%, basically tells us how well the modal spectra of the two analyzers overlap. Combined with knowledge of the modal spectrum of a single analyzer (cf. Fig. 2), this value yields the modal bandwidth  $N$  of the analyzers. The experimental value of 98% [9], which is the fidelity of one analyzer mode as measured by the other analyzer, corresponds to a modal bandwidth  $N \approx 125000$  (which corresponds, in fact, to the diffraction limit of the full optical setup). Consequently, the analyzers are not a bottleneck in this experiment and we can therefore conclude that the dimensionality of the probed Hilbert space is  $3700 < D < 125000$ .

In conclusion, we have reported an experiment on SPDC twin-photons demonstrating, within the quantum-mechanical description of SPDC, the entanglement of twin photons with respect to their fractional OAM. As this experiment involves a unitary transformation of basis from the natural LG states with integer OAM to a new basis with fractional OAM, the data explicitly shows that a very large part of the spatial Hilbert space is entangled, the dimensionality of which we estimate as  $D > 3700$  per photon. The entangled space that we have probed in this experiment only represents one particular cross section of the full Hilbert space of (spatial) two-photon states. Presently, we are designing analyzers with alternative spatial geometries and step heights, and, additionally, analyzers that operate on both amplitude and phase of the photon state. Experiments with such analyzers will possibly allow us to sample a large variety of cross sections of the full Hilbert space.

### Acknowledgments

We acknowledge J. A. W. van Houwelingen for his work on testing the spiral phase plates. This work is part of the research program of the ‘Stichting voor Fundamenteel Onderzoek der Materie (FOM)’ and is supported by the EU program ATESIT.

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